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THE JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW

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“MENASSEH BEN ISRAEL’S MISSION TO OLIVER CROMWELL.”

IN 1655, Menasseh ben Israel came to England in the hope of obtaining from the Lord Protector and the Council of State permission for Jews to settle in England, and to practise without secrecy or restraint the rights of their religion. After two and a half centuries, the history of Menasseh’s mission, its origin, its incidents, and its consequences, has for the first time been set forth in the volume prepared by Mr. Lucien Wolf for the Jewish Historical Society of England¹. In an admirable narrative, Mr. Wolf tells the story of the Resettlement; and indirectly he makes it clear why the story has never before been fully told. Whoever is at all acquainted with the sources from which the history of the seventeenth century has to be written, knows that of all periods it is the most perplexing and intractable. “Dreariest continent of shot-rubbish the eye ever saw,” said Carlyle, “trackless, without index, without finger-post.” Mr. Wolf has had to be his own Dryasdust before he could become a historian. Pamphlets which

¹ *Menasseh Ben Israel’s Mission to Oliver Cromwell: being a reprint of the Pamphlets published by Menasseh Ben Israel to promote the Readmission of the Jews into England, 1649-1656.* Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Lucien Wolf. London, Macmillan, 1901.

had long vanished from human sight have had to be rediscovered and perused. Private letters, begging petitions, a Marrano merchant's will, the depositions of a common informer, the gossip reported in News Letters, the information conveyed in the dispatches of ambassadors, have all had to be collected, interpreted, and judged before the historian could say with any accuracy or completeness what led Menasseh to England, what he achieved here, and what he failed to achieve.

Naturally, a certain portion of the material that Mr. Wolf has used was known to earlier writers who have attempted to deal with the Resettlement; some papers, also, of which the earlier writers could not have known, have now been made easily accessible through the publication of the Calendars of State Papers: but the greater part of the documentary evidence that Mr. Wolf has used has been brought to light through his own researches extending over nearly twenty years. His predecessors had no notion of bestowing such pains on history. Tovey gave a scanty and inaccurate account of Menasseh's mission, and embellished it with reflections which are based upon the supposition that poor Menasseh, who probably never knew a year's freedom from pecuniary troubles, was the master of great treasures with which he bribed the Protector and the more godly members of the Council of State. Dr. Kayserling, in his biography of Menasseh, kept close to the facts which were within his knowledge: but he was not intimately acquainted with the general course of English history in the seventeenth century, nor did he use the best sources of information. Some additions to the common stock of knowledge were made by Graetz, Picciotto, and Dr. Hermann Adler; but without disparagement to their historical zeal it may be said that their contributions are very modest as compared with the results of Mr. Wolf's researches.

The writers who have been named were, of course, familiar with Menasseh's pamphlets, with some of the State

Papers, and with two or three publications by Christian authors of the time relating to the Jewish question in England. From these sources they were acquainted with Menasseh’s peculiar views as to the bearing of Scriptural prophecies on the resettlement of the Jews in England, and with some details of his visit to this country, and of the proceedings of the Whitehall conference. They were aware of Cromwell’s friendly attitude, of the favourable opinion expressed by the Judges in 1655 as to the right of Jews to remain in England, and of the fact that before the end of the Commonwealth a small Jewish community was established in London. But these scraps of knowledge were as tantalizing as scattered pieces of a puzzle until Mr. Wolf, equipped with a copious supply of new facts relating to the founders of the Jewish community, and with a minute knowledge of the history of the Commonwealth, was able to show how the puzzle should be fitted together. It would have been impossible for any writer who had not studied with equal care the English and the Jewish history of the period to deal adequately with the Resettlement: as, indeed, it is impossible without similar preparation to do justice to any important episode in the history of the Jews of England. Just as the history of the English Jews before the Expulsion exhibits not only the fortunes and sufferings of some hundreds of Jewish families, but also (and as clearly) the shifting relations of the Kings of England with their baronage, the citizens of their towns, and the Papal power; just as the records of the Emancipation struggle serve both as a chronicle of an epoch of vital importance to the Jewish race and as a faithful epitome of the progress of Liberalism in the English nation; so the Resettlement movement, now that its course has been adequately described, is seen to be at once a result and an illustration of the working of two sets of forces—of which the one compelled the Jews of Europe in the seventeenth century to seek new homes and new opportunities for the exercise of their commercial activity, while the other caused

a portion of the English nation, partly through tolerant feeling, partly through a peculiar view of religious duty, partly through commercial ambition, to desire the unconcealed residence of Jews in this country. It is due to Mr. Wolf's researches, of which the results are set forth in his present essay and in his many earlier writings on kindred subjects, that it is now possible to understand the nature of the forces at work and their reciprocal action.

The Inquisition in Spain and Portugal and in the dominions outside Europe possessed by those countries was the most potent of the causes that imposed on the Jews of the seventeenth century the necessity of looking for new homes in countries from which they had hitherto been excluded. Great numbers of crypto-Jews remained in Spain and Portugal after the great Expulsions of 1492 and 1496, and many of them acquired or retained wealth and distinction. But, when once they fell into the hands of the officers of the Inquisition, their fate was torture and spoliation. There is, unhappily, no lack of evidence to show how cruel were the outbursts of persecution by which the Spanish and Portuguese Marranos were at all times liable to be attacked. Experience of suffering, and the sense of insecurity which must have surrounded them even at the time of their greatest apparent prosperity, drove one family after another of Spanish and Portuguese crypto-Jews to seek a home in countries where they might hope to live unmolested. The stream of emigration flowed steadily on during the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century. Marrano refugees settled in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Bordeaux, Nice, Hamburg, Reggio, Pernambuco, and Bahia. In the reign of Charles I and the early years of the Commonwealth, a few merchants from Spain and Portugal, attracted to this country no doubt by its Protestantism and its growing commercial importance, founded a Jewish settlement in London. They sought no authorization: they raised no questions as to their right to live and carry

on trade within the British dominions; nor for many years was any question of the kind raised to their detriment. Their houses were unmolested, and their business affairs flourished. Thanks to Mr. Wolf’s researches, a considerable amount of information has been collected bearing on the history of this community up to 1656, the year in which the Government of the country first had official cognizance of its existence. The names of twenty-six Jewish heads of families who lived in England before that date are known: and information is available as to the early history of five. Of these, four are known to have been driven from home either by the experience or the prospect of persecution by the Inquisition; and there is good reason to believe that this was the case with the fifth. One of them, Antonio Robles, had first fled from Spain to the Canary Islands to escape tortures such as those under which his father had died and his mother had been crippled, and from his new home in the Canary Islands he had come to England, because orders had been sent out by the Inquisition for his arrest. Another, Domingo de la Cerda, had for the same cause left Spain, and taken refuge in England: Duarte Henriques had been despoiled of his estates in the Canary Islands because he was a Jew: David Abarbanel Dormido had been arrested by the Inquisition, put to cruel torments on the rack, and kept in prison for five years: Antonio Ferdinando Carvajal had probably been compelled by the Inquisition to leave his early home at Fundao.

In the middle of the seventeenth century the need for new homes for refugee Jews became more pressing than it had ever been before. There was no cessation of persecution in Spain and Portugal: the rising of the Cossacks under Chmielnicki in 1648 drove thousands of Jews from Poland: the conquest of Brazil by Portugal in 1654 threw back on to the old world many Jewish families who had for a time enjoyed prosperity in Pernambuco and Bahia. And whether they came from Spain or Portugal, from

Eastern Europe or from America, the refugees turned first for succour to their happily-placed brethren who formed the Jewish communities of Holland. To the Jews of Holland, desirous of helping their co-religionists, but confronted with a task to which their resources were unequal, the fact that a small crypto-Jewish settlement had recently been established in London would by itself have been enough to suggest that what had already been done in this country secretly and on a small scale might be done on a larger scale and with the express permission of the Government.

If Mr. Wolf's only considerable discovery had been that of the existence of a crypto-Jewish community in London in the early years of the Commonwealth, he would have done more than any of his predecessors to explain the origin of Menasseh's mission. But this represents only one branch of his researches. While the Jews of the seventeenth century were enduring in many parts of the world troubles which compelled them to look for new harbours of refuge, there had risen into temporary prominence in the political and religious thought of England two ideas which inevitably suggested proposals for legalizing the residence of Jews in this country. In the fifth decade of the seventeenth century, many of the sectaries and soldiers who were to become keen supporters of the Commonwealth adopted the principle of the unrestricted toleration, not only of all forms of Christianity, but also of Judaism and other religions. Within the same period men of a different cast of mind endeavoured to persuade their fellow countrymen that it was one of the duties of England as a Christian country, more especially with a view to hastening the Millennium, to seek all possible opportunities for converting the Jews. Mr. Wolf has studied with great care these two movements of thought and their bearing on the Resettlement; and he has been rewarded by discovering among the pamphlets and official documents of the period a remarkable number of proposals and expressions of opinion favourable to the readmission

of the Jews, which are of a date antecedent to the publication of the first suggestion on the subject by a member of the Jewish race.

In 1643 Roger Williams, in his *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed*, argued, with frequent reference to the Jews, that all forms of worship should be freely tolerated, and that non-Christian systems of religion “are only to be fought against with that sword which is only, in soul matters, able to conquer; to wit, the sword of God’s Spirit, the Word of God.” In 1646 there was published a reprint of the pamphlet on *Religion’s Peace*, in which Leonard Busher had advocated forty years earlier a policy of complete freedom of conscience, in accordance with which the Jews should “inhabit and dwell under His Majesty’s dominion, to the great profit of his realms and to their furtherance in the faith; the which we are bound to seek in all love and peace, so well as others, to our utmost endeavour.” In 1647 Hugh Peters published *A Word for the Army and Two Words to the Kingdom*, in which, among other remedies for the ills of the kingdom, he proposed “That merchants may have all manner of encouragement . . . and strangers, even Jews, admitted to trade and live with us; that it may not be said, we pray for their conversion, with whom we will not converse, we being all but strangers on the earth.” In the same year the Council of Mechanics at Whitehall voted “A Toleration of all religions whatsoever, not excepting Turkes, nor Papists, nor Jewes.” In 1648 appeared *An Apology for the Honorable Nation of the Jews*, by Edward Nicholas, in which the admission of the Jews was advocated in order that the English people might escape the punishment that was due to them on account of their cruel treatment of Jews in earlier times, and might in the future share the blessings which according to Divine promise the Jews were to enjoy. In 1649 there was presented to Fairfax and to the Council of Officers a Petition from Johanna Cartwright and her son, asking that “under the

Christian banner of charity and brotherly love," the Jews might "again be received and permitted to trade and dwell amongst you in this land as they now do in the Netherlands." This Petition "was presented to the generall Councell of the officers of the army under the Command of his Excellency, Thomas Lord Fairfax, at Whitehall on Jan. 5 [1649]. And favourably received with a promise to take it into speedy consideration, when the present more publike affaires are dispatched." In the same year there appeared three further pamphlets of strongly pro-Jewish tendency, viz.:—Sadler's *Rights of the Kingdom*, Dury's *Epistological Discourse*, and Thorowgood's *Jews in America*, while Chilmead published an English translation of Leon de Modena's *Historia dei Riti Ebraici*. It was not only in print that pro-Jewish sentiment showed itself: in various parts of England and Wales Christian enthusiasts took to the practice of Jewish rites and ceremonies, while the epitaphs in the Jewish cemetery at Amsterdam show that a whole family of English Christians migrated to that city to be received as members of the Synagogue.

Any member of the Jewish race whose thoughts had ever been occupied with speculations as to the methods by which the troubles of his fellow Jews in Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere could be relieved, must have been deeply interested by this outburst of feeling in England. Doubtless there were many Jews in the Netherlands, in Italy, in Spain, and in Portugal, by whom the new movement was watched. But there was one man who for many reasons followed its progress with peculiar attention. Menasseh ben Israel, one of the ministers of the Jewish congregation of Amsterdam, had lived in Holland since his boyhood; but, as the son of a Marrano who had left Lisbon after being persecuted by the Inquisition, he had a personal concern for the fortunes of "such as sat in the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal"; and, as a scholar who was in frequent correspondence on questions of Hebrew learning with English students of theology, he was exceptionally

well informed as to the progress of religious feeling in England. His disposition was such as to make him very ready to aspire to a prominent part in any movement for the improvement of the condition of the Jews. He was a restless, public-spirited man, full of confidence that by the workings of Divine Providence a glorious future was being prepared for the scattered remnant of Israel, and far from disinclined to believe that Providence might well regard him as one of the most suitable agents to be used in carrying out its designs. Well acquainted with the existence of the crypto-Jewish community of London, he could not fail, when his Christian correspondents wrote to him about the progress of pro-Jewish sentiment in England, to be struck with the idea that it might be possible to derive therefrom some practical advantage for his co-religionists.

And there was a peculiarity of his Christian friends in England which strengthened the other motives leading him in this direction. Among his English correspondents were men who attached great importance to what are known as Millennarian speculations. They believed that the Millennium, the period of a thousand years of peace and prosperity for the saints on earth, of which they found predictions both in the Old and the New Testaments, was near at hand. Now it was generally recognized, in accordance with the text of Scriptural prophecies, that the Millennium must necessarily be heralded or accompanied by the restoration to the Holy Land of the Jews from all parts of the earth: and on this subject Menasseh’s friends sought from him information and guidance. Some questions which one of them put before him in 1649 set at work in his mind a train of ideas, which led to a curious result. It chanced that in the year 1644 a Portuguese Jew named Antonio Montezino, or Aaron Levi, visited Amsterdam, and related, in the presence of Menasseh ben Israel and other Jews of the city, how in South America he had encountered Jews of the tribe of Reuben. Five years afterwards, when Menasseh was

consulted by his Millennarian friends in England as to the restoration of the Jews, it occurred to him that this story might have an important bearing on the matter. He had convinced himself from his Scriptural studies that, before the Jews could be restored, it was necessary that their dispersion over the earth should be complete. The discovery of the tribe of Reuben in America showed that their dispersion was already much wider than had been known. Indeed, if they could only gain admission to England—so the thought must have flashed on him—their dispersion from one end of the earth to the other would be complete, and their restoration to the Holy Land, that event which to Jews and Christians was equally momentous, would be so much the nearer. Satisfied with the validity of his own reasoning, Menasseh published in 1650 a pamphlet entitled the *Hope of Israel*, in which he repeated and defended the story of Montezino, hoping that the English people might recognize that it was their duty to expedite the ultimate restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land by allowing them to settle in England. The practical object of the publication could be easily detected by a careful reader, but was not definitely stated in the body of the pamphlet. In order, however, that there might be no uncertainty on this point, Menasseh dedicated his little book to “the Parliament, the Supream Court of England and to the Right Honourable the Councill of State.” In his Epistle Dedicatory he explained his reasons for doing so. “As for me (most renowned Fathers),” he said, “in my dedicating this Discourse to you, I can truly affirm that I am induced to it upon no other ground than this, that I may gain your favour and good will to our Nation, now scattered almost all over the earth ; neither think that I do this as if I were ignorant how much you have hitherto favored our Nation ; for it is made known to me and to others of our Nation by them who are so happy as near at hand to observe your apprehensions, that you do vouchsafe to help us not onely by your prayers ; yea, this hath

compelled me to speak to you publickly, and to give you thanks for that your charitable affection towards us, and not such thanks which come only from the tongue, but such as are conceived by a grateful mind. Give me leave therefore (most renowned fathers) to supplicate you that you would stil favor our good, and farther love us.” That Menasseh’s intentions were fully understood by English readers was made clear by the controversial literature which his pamphlet called forth. Shortly after the publication of the *Hope of Israel*, he applied for facilities to visit England in order to plead for the admission of the Jews, and he was supplied, as he relates, with “a very favourable passe-port¹.”

From what has been said above, it will be seen that there is no uncertainty as to the causes which led Menasseh to conceive the idea of his mission to England. In view of the conditions that have been indicated—the need of a new home for the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, the hopefulness of the prospect in England as disclosed by the prosperity of the small crypto-Jewish community in London, the spontaneous display by English writers and public men of friendly feeling towards the Jews, and finally, Menasseh’s belief in the connexion between the return of the Jews to England and their restoration to the Holy Land—it may fairly be considered that the inception in 1650 of the Resettlement movement has been adequately explained.

The explanation is almost entirely due to Mr. Wolf: and it is he also who was the first to recognize the next important link in the chain of events.

When Menasseh first thought of advocating the admission of the Jews to England, he counted no doubt on a large measure of support from influential sections of the English nation: but he cannot have anticipated that the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth would be one of his most ardent helpers. Yet Mr. Wolf has shown that this was the case; and, by devoting the necessary attention to the trade

¹ *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, p. 144 of Mr. Wolf’s edition.

policy of Cromwell and the commercial conditions of the time, he has been able to show why it was the case.

In 1651 the English Parliament, on the recommendation of the Council of State, passed a Navigation Act, which provided that henceforth there should not be imported into any part of the British dominions the produce of any country in Asia, Africa, or America, except in vessels owned by Englishmen, and that European products should be imported only in English vessels or in vessels owned by natives of the exporting country. The object of this Act was to transfer to England the commercial supremacy of Holland. Hitherto the latter country, by virtue of the commercial ability and large capital of its merchants, had enjoyed a predominant share in the carrying trade and financial business of the world; but, if the Act should be effective, the Dutch "would be disabled from bringing into England or her colonies anything but the scanty produce of their own soil¹." Now the Act could not succeed unless England was able to command an abundant supply of capital and of business enterprise and ability. The English nation, which within the preceding half-century had magnificently inaugurated its career of colonial expansion by establishing outposts in the East Indies, the West Indies, and the continent of America, was not wanting in the qualifications that commercial greatness required. But a statesman with Cromwell's breadth of view and wide-reaching ambition for English commerce, could not fail to be anxious that the country's resources should be further strengthened by the immigration of large capitalists experienced in the successful conduct of foreign trade. He was well aware that the continental Jews had won for themselves a pre-eminent position in the trade between the different countries of Europe, and between Europe and the East and West Indies and Brazil²; he knew also that some crypto-Jews were

¹ S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 82-3.

² An interesting passage in a letter written by one Royalist agent to another shows that Englishmen abroad realized the importance of

already in England carrying on the same pursuits. It was inevitable that, when he heard of Menasseh’s suggestion that the right of Jews to live in England should be recognized, he should at once welcome a proposal that was so closely in accord with his commercial ambitions and with his inclination towards toleration in matters of religion.

The time and manner of Menasseh’s first communication with the English Government are not known with any exactness¹. From the passage in the *Vindiciae*, to which reference has been made above, it appears that he wrote to the Council of State immediately after the publication of

Cromwell’s action in 1655. In a letter to Sir E. Nicholas, dated Brussels, September 20, 1655, Sir Marmaduke Langdale writes: “I am very sorry that they [the Jews] agree with Cromwell. The Jews are considerable all the world over and the great masters of money. If his Majesty could either have them or divert them from Cromwell, it were a very good service. I heard of this 3 years ago, but hoped the Jews who understand the interest of all the princes in the world had been too wise to adventure themselves and estates under Cromwell when they may by his death or other alteration in that kingdom run the hazard of an absolute ruin.”—*Nicholas Papers* (edited by G. F. Warner for Camden Society), III, 51.

¹ On p. xxix of his Introduction Mr. Wolf says that “the Readmission of the Jews to England was one of Cromwell’s own schemes . . . there is ample evidence that he was the mainspring of the whole movement and that Menasseh was but a puppet in his hands.” On p. xxxiv, referring to Dormido’s visit to England, he says: “Cromwell’s action can only be explained by the theory that he was, as I have suggested, the instigator of the whole movement.” I am unable to agree with these statements. Menasseh was certainly acting on his own initiative when, in 1650, he inaugurated the Resettlement movement by the publication of the English and Latin editions of the *Hope of Israel*, with the remarkable dedication to the English Parliament and Council of State. According to his own statement, he was acting equally on his own initiative when, almost immediately after the publication of his pamphlet, he applied for permission to visit England (*Vindiciae*, p. 144 of Mr. Wolf’s volume). It appears to me that, in the absence of any direct evidence to the contrary, Menasseh’s account should be accepted. Of course, my dissent from the suggestion contained in the sentences quoted in this note does not lessen my appreciation of the remarkable service which Mr. Wolf has rendered by drawing attention to Cromwell’s vigorous and consistent support of the Resettlement proposals and to the causes to which it was due.

the *Hope of Israel* in 1650. There is no doubt that in the spring of 1651, it was believed in Amsterdam that Cromwell intended to sanction the residence of the Jews in England, and on this account, as Menasseh wrote a few years later, "the Ambassadors of England were received in the Synagogue with as great pomp and applause, Hymns and cheerfulness of minde, as ever any Sovereigne Prince was. For our people did in their owne mindes presage, that the Kingly Government being now changed into that of a Commonwealth, the antient hatred towards them would also be changed into good-will." In October, 1651, another letter from Menasseh was received by the Council of State, and it is probable that a second passport was then issued to enable him to come to England. Similar passports were issued in November, 1652, December, 1652, and September, 1653: but the war between England and Holland (July, 1652, to April, 1654), and the difficulties of his own position in Amsterdam, deterred him from making the journey. In 1654 David Abarbanel Dormido, Menasseh's brother-in-law, a merchant who had fled from Brazil to Amsterdam at the time of the Portuguese conquest, came to England, and acting, no doubt, in accordance with Menasseh's advice, presented to Cromwell a petition asking that the Jews might be permitted to settle in this country. Cromwell urged his Council to return a favourable answer, but they declined to take any action. Within the next few months, however, Cromwell was able to give two remarkable indications of the good will with which he regarded the Jewish cause. In February, 1655, he took the unusual step of writing a letter to the King of Portugal asking that payment might be enforced of certain debts due by Portuguese subjects in Pernambuco to relatives of Dormido, who of course was not a British subject and had no claim to the Protector's good offices. In August, 1655, he granted a patent of denization to Antonio Ferdinando Carvajal and his two sons, who were all members of the crypto-Jewish community of London.

In October, 1655, after five years of waiting, Menasseh at length decided to visit England. “I could not,” he says, “be at quiet in my mind (I know not but that it might be through some particular divine providence) till I had anew made my humble addresses to his Highnesse the Lord Protector (whom God preserve). And finding that my coming over would not be altogether unwelcome to him, with those great hopes which I conceived, I joyfully took my leave of my house, my friends, my kindred, all my advantages there, and the country wherein I have lived all my life time, under the benign protection and favour of the Lords, the States General, and Magistrates of Amsterdam ; in fine (I say) I parted with them all and took my voyage for England.”

Several of the incidents of his stay in England are well known from accounts given by himself and by contemporary writers : but on some points of the first importance Mr. Wolf has been able by careful study of the authorities to correct statements hitherto repeated in all works on Anglo-Jewish history. When Menasseh arrived in London in October, 1655, he brought with him petitions from the Jews of various parts of Europe, and the English manuscript of his own “Humble Address.” The latter was at once printed and published, and on October 31 he went to Whitehall and presented copies to the Council of State. The “Humble Address” asked “in behalf of the Jewish nation” for the free exercise of the Jewish religion, “that we may have our Synagogues, and keep our own publick worship, as our brethren doe in Italy, Germany, Poland, and many other places.” A detailed list of the concessions that the Jews desired was then drawn up and embodied in a petition presented by Menasseh to Cromwell in person. The concessions were (1) security of life and property, (2) liberty of public worship, (3) the right to acquire a cemetery, (4) permission to trade “in all kinds of merchandise like other merchants,” (5) the appointment by Cromwell of an officer to examine the passports of Jewish

immigrants and to compel them to swear allegiance to the Government, (6) jurisdiction to be exercised by the "Chief of the Synagogue" in disputes between Jews, with a right of appeal to the civil courts, (7) that "if peradventure there existed any laws against the Jews, they might for the sake of greater security be rescinded."

Menasseh's detailed petition was referred by Cromwell to the Council of State, and the Council appointed a committee of six of their number to consider it. On Nov. 14 it was decided, in view of the novelty and importance of the issues raised, to summon a conference, representative of outside public opinion, to assist the Committee of Council with their advice. The persons summoned included three judges, two well-known politicians, seven eminent merchants, and seventeen clergymen. The conference met four times, viz. on December 4, 7, 12, and 18, under the presidency of Cromwell. Of the proceedings of these days several accounts are extant, and, though none is complete, there is enough evidence to show what was the general course of the discussion. The two questions submitted by Cromwell were (1) whether it was legal to admit the Jews, and (2) supposing it to be legal, what were the conditions on which it was fitting that they should be received. The first question was soon decided. Of the three judges who had been summoned to the conference only two attended, viz. Chief Justice Glynne and Chief Baron Steele. They both stated that there was no law forbidding the Jews to return to England. The discussion therefore resolved itself into a consideration of the second question. Cromwell spoke several times, indicating clearly his desire that the full concessions for which Menasseh asked should be granted; but he professed that "he had no engagements [to the Jews] but on Scripture grounds." Sir H. Laurence, the president of the Council, and General Lambert spoke to the same effect as the Protector.

Among the clergy, who were more than half of the non-official members of the conference, a clear majority

favoured the view that there was no objection to the return of the Jews, provided that suitable conditions were imposed to prevent them from attacking the Christian religion. Some of the clergy were prepared to go much further, and to support a resolution setting forth that it was not only permissible but was actually a Christian duty to receive and harbour Jews, and to allow them to carry on divine worship. This view was supported by an appeal to the prospect that England might, by admitting the Jews, take its share in the glorious work of converting them, and might also escape the divine retribution to which the nation was liable on account of the cruelty with which Jews had been treated before the Expulsion in 1290. On the other hand, a minority among the clergy, fearing lest Jews might be more likely to convert Christians than to be converted by them, desired that nothing should be said or done to encourage them to return to England.

The most strenuous opposition to the grant of any concession whatever was offered by the representatives of the mercantile interest. The explanation of their action is, of course, very simple. Being in possession of England’s foreign trade they objected to a proposal that they should share it with Jewish rivals. Merchants who each had his own affairs and his own profit to consider were naturally little touched by Cromwell’s far-reaching anticipations of the increase in the total trade of the country that might result from the introduction of Jewish capital and ability. There is nothing remarkable in this: but there is some interest in observing that the spirit displayed towards the Jews by the chief representative of the mercantile interest at the conference was precisely the same that was displayed on other occasions towards English merchants. The chief opponent at the conference of the admission of the Jews was Sir Christopher Packe. “Of all the head pieces that were there,” says a contemporary politician, “he was thought to give the strongest reasons against their coming in.” Now Sir Christopher Packe was

the governor of the Company of Merchant Adventurers, which existed in order to maintain and exploit the principle that the right to engage in foreign trade should be the exclusive privilege of a close corporation; and frequent complaints were made to Parliament in the seventeenth century by English manufacturers and "free merchants" of the oppressive rigour with which the Company of Merchant Adventurers exercised the monopolies which it enjoyed¹. On all such occasions during the Commonwealth Sir Christopher Packe showed himself the most active and capable defender of the vicious economic principle on which the Company was founded. It is well to bear in mind these facts, because they show that the violent opposition of the merchants to Menasseh's proposals was neither an outcome of anti-Semitic feeling nor an isolated instance of commercial exclusiveness, but the application to a particular case of an economic theory which was still widely accepted.

Apparently the view of the merchants was that, although under the existing law Jews were at liberty to settle in England, the Government should adopt measures to prevent them from doing so. This view had no chance of acceptance, since Cromwell himself, several members of the Council of State, and the majority of the clergy, had declared themselves in favour of admitting the Jews under certain conditions. But some of the clergy were willing that the conditions should be stringent; and accordingly attempts were made to arrange a compromise. One ridiculous proposal was made by a benevolent clergyman who, in the hope of overcoming the opposition of the merchants, suggested that the Jews should be confined to certain decayed seaports, and should pay customs duties on goods transported between those ports and the rest of England, besides the duties payable on goods transported between

¹ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book V, chapter i, part 3: "Of the public works and institutions which are necessary for facilitating particular branches of commerce."

England and other countries. In another resolution, which appears to have been drafted by a responsible official or a member of the Government in order to express in definite form the wishes of the majority of the conference, a different set of restrictions was suggested. The draft resolution sets forth that to allow Jews to have synagogues and places of worship “is not only eville in itselfe, but likewise very scandalous to other Christian churches”; and that “great prejudice is like to arise to the natives of this commonwealth in matter of trade, which besides other dangers here mentioned we find very commonly suggested by the inhabitants of the City of London.” A series of conditions is accordingly proposed, of which the most important are “that they be not admitted to have any publicke Judicatoryes, whether civill or ecclesiasticall, which were to grant them terms beyond the condition of strangers,” that “they bear no publicke office or trust in this commonwealth,” and that “so farre as may be [they be] not suffered to discourage any of their owne from usinge or applyinge themselves to any which may tend to convince them of their error and turn them to Christianity. And that some severe penalty be imposed upon them who shall apostatize from Christianity to Judaisme.”

To Cromwell who, as a matter of statesmanship, wished to hold out liberal inducements to the Jews to bring their capital to England, the adoption by the conference of any recommendation in favour of admitting them subject to onerous restrictions would have been useless, and worse than useless. The legal right of the Jews to settle in England had been authoritatively declared: and, under the laws of the Commonwealth, any person living in England was practically at liberty to celebrate any form of religious worship that was not Papistical, Prelatical, or licentious¹.

¹ The Recusancy Acts, by which heavy fines were imposed on all persons neglecting to attend the Parish Church, were repealed in 1650 (S. R. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, pp. 300-3). The “Instrument of Government” of 1653 provided that no person was

When, therefore, the inclination of the conference in favour of imposing special disabilities became manifest, Cromwell at once dealt with the situation in the true Cromwellian manner. He dissolved the conference without allowing it to formulate any conclusion, and told the members that he and the Council of State "had much need of all their prayers that the Lord would direct them so as may be to His glory and to the good of the nation."

In spite of Cromwell's concluding remark, no official communication was made by the Council of State to Menasseh, nor do the records of their proceedings show that they devoted any further consideration to his proposals. Menasseh's public participation in the attempt to secure the legal resettlement of his co-religionists in England may, therefore, be regarded as having ended with the dissolution of the advisory conference. His name is found, indeed, among the signatures to a petition presented to Cromwell on March 24, 1656, by six members of the Marrano community of London; and in April of the same year he published the most interesting and impressive of his English writings, the *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, in which he defended the members of the Jewish race against some of the wild accusations that had been circulated during the discussion of the proposals for the Readmission. But this tract, admirable as it is, does not appear to have excited at the time any large measure of public interest. Apparently it was less read than its mystical predecessor, the *Hope of Israel*.

Nevertheless, during the months following on the Whitehall conference the position of the Jews in England was greatly strengthened. Cromwell informally assured the members of the Marrano community that he would assist them to maintain the rights which they had been shown to

to be compelled by penalties or otherwise to profess Christianity (ibid. p. 324). Although no form of non-Christian public worship was recognized as legal (ibid., Article XXXVII), there was apparently no penalty provided against the public celebration of Jewish worship.

possess, provided they exercised them quietly and with discretion. They acted in accordance with his advice, carrying on their occupations as before and worshipping in a private house. Their numbers were no doubt increased by the occasional arrival of new immigrants. The security of their position was successfully tested in the spring of 1656, in the course of an inquiry relating to the affairs of a Jewish merchant of London, Antonio Robles. Under the authority of a proclamation of the Privy Council declaring all Spanish money, merchandise, and shipping to be lawful prize, property belonging to Robles was seized by the Government. He claimed restitution on the ground that he was a Jew of Portuguese origin; and several of his co-religionists testified before the court of inquiry that he and they professed the Jewish religion. In due course the goods of Robles were restored to him, and the right of Jews to live in England was thus implicitly recognized by a quasi-judicial authority. Two facts of purely communal interest also indicate the security of the Jewish position in England during the later years of the Commonwealth. In 1657 Carvajal and Caceres signed a lease for a Jewish cemetery at Mile End; and in 1659 Carvajal made a will in which he bequeathed £30 to the Jewish poor of London.

Thus, in spite of the failure of the Whitehall conference and the silence of the Council of State, Menasseh’s mission led directly to the establishment on a recognized legal basis of the Jewish community of England. The result came about in a very different fashion from that which he desired; and his disappointment was possibly due to some extent to his mistaken method of advocacy. The restrictive proposals made at the conference by divines whose inclination was friendly to the Jewish cause may have been partly suggested by the complacent references in Menasseh’s pamphlets to cases in which Christians in other countries had been converted to Judaism. Other passages in which he showed how large a share of the profits of foreign trade

had fallen into the hands of Jews in countries where they were well treated, may have alarmed the London merchants and intensified their opposition. Nevertheless, in spite of his errors of judgement and the apparent incompleteness of his success, Menasseh had performed a great and timely work for the Jewish race. The favourable condition of the English law, which the Judges set forth at the conference of 1655, had been previously unknown. It was due to Menasseh's mission that the true state of the law was declared by Chief Justice Glynne and Chief Baron Steele; and this declaration was a greater boon to the Jews than any success that the most brilliant advocacy could have achieved. There is no passage in Mr. Wolf's essay which shows a more masterly understanding of the forces which were shaping the fortunes of the Jews in England during the critical period of the Commonwealth, than that in which he points out how much English Judaism gained through the unostentatious manner in which the Resettlement question was settled. "If the solution of the Jewish question arrived at towards the end of 1656 was not wholly satisfactory, it was precisely in that fact that its real strength lay. Experimental compromise is the law of English political progress. From the strife of wills had emerged a compromise which conformed to this law, and which consequently made the final solution of the question an integral part of English political evolution. The great merit of the settlement was that, while it disturbed little, it gave the Jews a future in the country on the condition that they were fitted to possess it. The fact that in its initial stage it disturbed so little rendered it easy for Charles II to connive at it. Had Menasseh ben Israel's idea been realized in its entirety, the task of the restored Monarchy would have been more difficult. London would have been overrun by destitute Polish and Bohemian Jews driven westward by persecution, some fanaticised by their sufferings, others plying the parasitic trades into which commercial and industrial

disabilities had driven the denizens of the Central European Jewries. Many of them would have become identified with the wild Judaical sectaries who were the bitterest enemies of the Stuarts, while others would have given new life to the tradition of Jewish usury, which for nearly four hundred years had been only an historical reminiscence in the country. Under these circumstances, we can well conceive that a re-expulsion of the Jews might have been one of the first tasks of the Restoration. From this calamity England and the Jews were saved by the restricted character of the compromise of 1656.”

To Menasseh, worn out prematurely by the sorrows of a troubled life, the outcome of his mission may well have presented itself under a different aspect. Mr. Wolf states that he regarded it as “a compromise of a purely selfish nature,” and conjectures that it was his refusal to rest content with the new settlement that prevented him from becoming the Rabbi of the London congregation. The statement as to Menasseh’s attitude is somewhat more definite than the evidence justifies. But it is certain that the man who had ventured into a strange country, in the hope of securing a home for the Jews of his own and future generations, found there no resting-place for himself. Within a year after the conclusion of the Whitehall conference, he was sick and destitute: and yet it was not to the rich Jewish merchants of London that he turned. “I make my moan to your Highness,” he wrote to Cromwell, “as the alone succourer of my life in this land of strangers to help in this present exigence.” Cromwell, in order to relieve his necessities, granted him first a gift of £25 and then a pension of £100. In September, 1657, his son died, and on his deathbed exacted from his father a promise to bury him in his native Holland. Again Menasseh turned, not to his co-religionists, but to Cromwell, and undertook to surrender his pension (of which no part had yet been paid to him), on condition that he should receive £200 wherewith to discharge his debts and meet the expenses of his journey.

This sum was never issued. Menasseh left England in the autumn of 1657, and died at Middelburg in Zeeland on November 20.

In the preceding pages some of the chief results of Mr. Wolf's researches have been summarized; but any student who would appreciate the remarkable value of his contribution to historical knowledge must familiarize himself, not only with his latest essay and with his earlier writings on the subject, but also with the accounts of the Resettlement that had previously been published. In this way alone is it possible to realize how much more complete, intelligible, and interesting is his narrative than that of any of his predecessors. The elements of the story which he was the first to make known include the existence of the crypto-Jewish community in London before Menasseh's mission, the personal history of its members, the growth of pro-Jewish sentiment in England before 1650, the relation between the Jewish question and Cromwell's commercial policy, and the quasi-legal recognition in the period between the Whitehall conference and the end of the Protectorate of the existence of the Jewish community in London. Until these pieces of knowledge were supplied, it was impossible that the first chapter of modern Anglo-Jewish history should be intelligibly written. All that was possible was either an honest statement of disconnected facts, or a narrative invested by hazardous conjectures with an appearance of completeness. When such was the state of knowledge, there was little to be gained from the study of this period of Anglo-Jewish history. As Mr. Wolf has now told the story, it is one of romantic interest, so great are the issues with which it deals, so varied the influences by which the result was shaped, so unexpected the vicissitudes which six years witnessed. And there is more than interest to be found in the story. If the Jews of Europe are to be well equipped for meeting the troubles which may threaten them in the future, they must be acquainted with the relations that have existed in the

past between their co-religionists and their non-Jewish fellow citizens; and, when the history of a crisis in the affairs of the Jews in any country is faithfully told, a great service is rendered to the race. Such a service Mr. Wolf has rendered. He has for the first time made it clear who were the friends and who the opponents of the Jews in England in the seventeenth century, against what prejudices they had to contend, and what were the forces that worked in their favour. By his treatment of one great episode he has shown how the history of the Jews in England should be written; and in so doing he has shown why it should be written.

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